

NSC BRIEFING

12 February 1958

EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN UNION

- I. After 21 February plebiscite electing Nasir head of new United Arab Republic, a 400-member national assembly, a 16-man central cabinet and two "executive councils" (one for each country) will be named.
  - A. Toughest personnel problem is likely to be military slots, especially what to do with Bizri, whose removal was supposed to have been original reason for Egyptian effort to alter situation in Syria.
  - B. Egyptians and Syrians also talk of naming various joint economic boards.
- II. Most important and immediate problem is to maintain psychological momentum.
  - A. Major means is to obtain favorable responses, if not adherence in some form, of other Arab states.
    1. So far, however, Yemen is the only one to come forward; comments on this will be saved for a closer look at the Yemeni problem in a few moments.
    2. Pressure has been put most directly on Lebanon. Syrian President Quwatli has stated the union is the best "guarantee" of Lebanon's borders.

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III. Opposing efforts center in meeting in Amman of Hussayn and Faysal.

A. Principal move under discussion is confederation of Iraq and Jordan plus Saudi Arabia if possible.

1. Hussayn has urged that Iraq withdraw from Baghdad Pact in order to pave way for Saudi participation, but Saud appears to be lying low regardless of inducements.

2. Hussayn is reported to have offered to let Faysal be head of confederation, if his financial future assured.

3. At very least, Hussayn has proposed "reviving" friendship treaties of the three kings.

B. Iraqi crown prince has proposed again stationing Iraqi troops in Jordan.

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C.

D. Popular opinion in Iraq and Jordan is so favorable to Egyptian-Syrian union as a step toward Pan-Arab unity that their governments cannot oppose the United Arab Republic directly.

*1 Nasir claims he has been pushed to head new strong cabinet.*

IV. Moscow still soft-peddling union, but will probably extend recognition after Nasir is inaugurated.

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V. Israelis have so far emphasized the potential dangers of the Egyptian-Syrian move. They are particularly apprehensive that Jordan might be drawn in, thus practically surrounding them with Arab armies under a single command. Their present attitude seems to be to stand very firm and keep powder very dry.

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